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RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY

RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0165

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL PRIORITY

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RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000650

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CCA

STATE FOR DRL CNEWLING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/23/2019

TAGS: ECON PREL PHUM CU

SUBJECT: RELEASED CUBAN PRISONER PONDERS HIS OPTIONS,  
GRATEFUL TO SPAIN

REF: A. A) 08 HAVANA 162 (PRISONER RELEASES TO SPAIN)  
¶B. B) HAVANA 639 (MORATINOS VISIT)

HAVANA 00000650 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: COM Jonathan Farrar for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Government of Cuba (GOC) paroled political prisoner and "75'er" Nelson Aguiar Ramirez on October 20 following the visit of Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos. Aguiar was the first 75'er to be released since February, 2008, and is in extremely poor health. In conversation with Poloffs, Aguiar stated that he will attempt to seek medical treatment in Spain. If he is unsuccessful, he may approach the U.S. Cuban dissidents expressed happiness for Aguiar personally, but resented the GOC's strategy of trading political prisoners for political currency. End Summary.

DETAINED SINCE 2003

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¶2. (C) Political prisoner Nelson Alberto Aguiar Ramirez was detained in the spring of 2003 along with seventy-four other dissidents, the group that became known as the "75'ers." He was charged with "collaborating" with the United States (under Law 88) and sentenced to thirteen years in jail.  
(Note: Fifty-three of the 75'ers remain in jail. End note.) Aguiar's wife, Dolia Leal Francisco, was one of the founders of the Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White), an advocacy group comprising female relatives and supporters of political prisoners. Aguiar, who was already in chronically poor health when he was jailed, was held in the Cuban prison in Guantanamo province until November, 2004, when he was transferred to the hospital ward of Combinado del Este prison, in Havana. Prior to his release, he was described by several USINT contacts as one of the most ill 75'ers.

THREE TIMES A CHARM

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¶3. (C) Aguiar is believed to have been on a "short list" of prisoners for release at least twice before - in the summer of 2004, when eleven high-profile prisoners were released, as well as in February 2008, when the GOC released four 75'ers and their families into Spanish exile (Ref A). Aguiar is the first 75'er released early since 2008. (Fellow 75'er Ricardo

Librado Linares Garca was released in February, 2009, after completing his sentence.)

¶ 14. (C) During a meeting with USINT Poloffs on October 21, Aguiar recounted that a high-ranking state security officer told him that he would be the GOC's top choice if Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos requested a prisoner release. On October 21, a day after Moratinos' departure, Aguiar was taken from his hospital ward without warning, and released to his waiting wife. State security had informed her only hours before that they were freeing him.

¶ 15. (C) Aguiar is currently resting at home. He told Poloffs he plans to seek medical treatment in Spain, but may turn to the U.S. if he cannot find someone in Spain to cover his medical costs. He is suffering from a variety of ailments including herniated discs and advanced arthritis. His chronic poor health only worsened in prison, and prison officials failed to provide him medication or medical records upon his departure. Although he has been given parole rather than unconditional release, he claims that state security officials told him he could depart Cuba if he pleased. He did not ask them if he would ever be allowed to return.

NEGOTIATING FOR CARROTS

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¶ 16. (C) We spoke with Aguiar and his wife the day after he was released. Neither of them knew for certain why he had been chosen, but both credited a letter which Aguiar's wife wrote to Spanish Prime Minister Rodriguez Zapatero in 2008, describing Aguiar's delicate situation. His wife also believes that her lowered profile within the Damas de Blanco over the past few years might have made it easier for the GOC

HAVANA 00000650 002.2 OF 002

to release her husband. (Note: Leal insists that she diminished her Damas activities on the orders of her cardiologist, and not because she was attempting to secure Aguiar's release. End Note.) Aguiar's poor health and age (64) has always made him a likely candidate for release.

¶ 17. (C) COMMENT: State security discussions with Aguiar prior to his release suggest that prisoner negotiations between Spain and the GOC were at least in progress prior to Moratinos' visit, if not already concluded. Aguiar was clearly grateful for his release and viewed Spain's strategy of cooperation with Cuba as a sound one, telling us, "If one road doesn't work, it's best to try another one." Other contacts on the island disagreed, however, saying that while they were personally happy for Aguiar, political prisoners were neither currency nor carrots, and should not be traded for political favor.

FARRAR